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Office of the Secretary

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Communication is defined as the process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior.

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Being informed is one of the most crucial ways to perform adequately in society. There are many ways to get information nowadays; however, nothing has been proved to be more proficient, and accessible to the community than television. Another important source for being informed is the World Wide Web. However, access to the internet is more difficult for aged people since they do not have the resources and knowledge to navigate, and therefore get updated news. On the other hand, there are approximately twenty two million hearing-impaired people in the US, representing a 10% of the nation's population. Of these 22 million, almost 9 million are aged 65 and older, representing nearly 30 % of the hearing-impaired population. In order for hard hearing people be informed, and entertained through the most accessible media, television, there must be a visual language for them to read. This is called Closed Captioning (CC), and unfortunately federal laws still do not require all sizes of television sets have Closed Captioning.

Closed captioning is an assistive technology designed to provide access to television for persons with hearing disabilities. Through captioning, the audio portion of programming is displayed as text superimposed over the video.

Closed captioning displays the dialogue, narration and sound effects of a video program as words on a television screen, similar to subtitles. Unlike subtitled movies, closed captioning allows the viewer to choose whether or not to display the captions that are transmitted within the broadcast signal in encoded (or closed) form. A decoder built into or attached to a television set is used to "open" the captions and display the words on the TV screen.

The term "closed" in closed captioning means that not all viewers see the captions—only those who decode or activate them. This is distinguished from "open captions," where the captions are visible to all viewers. Captions that are permanently visible in a video, film, or other medium are called "burned-in" captions.

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In the U.S. and Canada, "captions" are distinguished from "subtitles." In these countries, "subtitles" assume the viewer can hear but cannot understand the language, so they only translate dialogue and some onscreen text. "Captions" aim to describe all significant audio content, as well as "non-speech information," such as the identity of speakers and their manner of speaking.

Closed captions provide a critical link to news, entertainment, and information for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing, enabling these individuals to be part of the cultural mainstream of our society. Also, for individuals whose native language is not English, English language captions have also been used to improve comprehension and fluency in this language. In addition, studies have shown that captions have helped children learn to read, and have improved literacy skills.

First of all, deaf and hard of hearing people have the same rights to be informed, understand, and enjoy any TV programs they choose. They depend on the media and it is not fair that they have to rely on others to help them through sign languages. The governmental affairs consultant of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), Frank Bowe, stated: "Critically important disability access provisions will come about only if Congress enacts an updated framework for telecommunications."

Similarly, Closed Captioning allows people learning English as an additional language understand it better. People first learn how to read, and others to read a transcript or dialogue of the audio portion of a video, film, or other presentation. It has been suggested that the largest audience of closed captioning are now in fact hearing people in ESL communities. In the US, the National Captioning Institute noted that ESL learners were the largest group buying decoders in the late 1980s and early 1990s (before built-in decoders became a standard feature of U.S. television sets). Even though English learners might have obtained the basic principles of the language, the grammatical structure and the vocabulary can be dramatically improved through reading what is being said.

Additionally, Closed Captioning have helped children to read, and have improved literacy skills . Remedial readers

National Captioning Institute (NCI) has partnered with Scholastic Entertainment to provide description and captioning services for Clifford's Puppy Days." Jack Gates, President and CEO of NCI Operations stated: "The combination of video descriptions and closed captioning on the program will help all children improve their language skills, along with benefiting from the life lessons they are exposed to through the program."

It should be also considered to modify the current exemptions, for both English and Spanish language programming:

- ✓ programs which are shown between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. local time;
- ✓ locally produced and distributed non-news programming with no repeat value (e.g., parades and school sports);
- ✓ commercials that are no more than five minutes long;
- ✓ instructional programming that is locally produced by public television stations for use in grades K-12 and post secondary schools (only covers programming narrowly distributed to individual educational institutions);
- ✓ programs in languages other than English or Spanish;
- ✓ programs shown on new networks for the first four years of the network's operations;
- ✓ public service announcements and promotional announcements that are shorter than 10 minutes, unless they are federally-funded or produced; and
- ✓ programming provided by program providers with annual gross revenues under \$3 million (although such programmers must pass through video programming that has already been captioned).

In addition, a video programming provider or distributor may file with the FCC a petition for an exemption for specific programming if supplying captions for that programming would result in an undue burden for the provider or distributor.

FCC must work on new rules to elevate highly closed captioning to a standard that is equivalent to the spoken English audio on TV programs. As well to the accuracy and synchronization of the text.